WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

SUB BY

1.   A method comprising:

(a)   hosting, on a server, a database of specification data of products of a plurality of different manufacturers, the product specification data in the database being arranged in predefined product classes;

(b)   defining, for each product class, a schema for the entry of specification data of products in that product class;

(c)   providing an interface for use by product manufacturers for entry of new product specification data into the database and for modifying existing product specification data in the database, the interface requiring each manufacturer to use a same schema when entering or modifying product specification data in a particular product class; and

(d)   in exchange for remuneration from a given manufacturer, providing that manufacturer with access to the interface and to its respective product specification data in the database for use outside of the database.

2.   The method recited in claim 1, wherein (d) comprises permitting the manufacturer to query product specification data from the database.

3.   The method recited in claim 1, wherein (d) comprises providing a manufacturer with a link to a Web page generated on behalf of the manufacturer that contains product specification data requested by the manufacturer.

4.   The method recited in claim 3, wherein (d) further comprises partnering with the manufacturer to permit the generated Web page to be co-branded.

5.   The method recited in claim 1, wherein (d) comprises exporting product specification data to a manufacturer in one of an Excel spreadsheet format (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a CSV format.

6. The method recited in claim 1, wherein (d) further comprises charging each manufacturer desiring to have access to the database a fee for such access.

5   7. The method recited in claim 6, wherein the fee is in the form of a monetary payment.

8. The method recited in claim 7, wherein the fee comprises a one-time fee.

10   9. The method recited in claim 7, wherein the fee comprises a periodically recurring fee.

10. The method recited in claim 7, wherein the fee is based on usage of the database by the manufacturers.

15

11. The method recited in claim 10, wherein the fee for a given manufacturer is based on the volume of product information stored in the database by that manufacturer.

12. The method recited in claim 10, wherein the fee for a given manufacturer is based

20 on a number of times that the manufacturer accesses the database to retrieve product specification data.

13. The method recited in claim 1, wherein (c) comprises permitting each manufacturer to add and edit the product specification data for a single product in the database.

25

14. The method recited in claim 1, wherein (c) comprises permitting a manufacturer to add or edit the product specification data for multiple products in a single data feed.

15.   The method recited in claim 14, wherein (c) further comprises accepting the product specification data for multiple products in the single data field in one of an Excel spreadsheet format (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a CSV format.

5   16.   A system for enabling an entity to serve as an application service provider with respect to product specification data of a plurality of manufacturers, comprising;

a database of specifications of products of the plurality of different manufacturers, the product specifications in the database being arranged in predefined product classes; and

an interface for use by the plurality of manufacturers for the entry of specifications of

10   products in a given product class, there being defined, for each product class, a schema for the entry of specifications of products in that product class, the interface requiring each manufacturer to use the defined schema for a given product class when entering product specification data for products in that class,

the interface further permitting each manufacturer that provides remuneration to the entity

15   to access its respective product specification data in the database for use outside of the database.

17.   The system recited in claim 16, wherein the interface further comprises a component that a manufacturer can use to search for and list product specification data stored in the database for its products.

20

18.   The system recited in claim 16, wherein the interface further comprises a component that a manufacturer can use to add and edit the product specification data for a single product in the database.

25   19.   The system recited in claim 16, wherein the interface further comprises a component that enables a manufacturer to add or edit the product specification data for multiple products in a single data feed.

20.   The system recited in claim 19, wherein the interface is capable of accepting product specification data for a product in one of an Excel spreadsheet format (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a CSV format.

5   21.   The system recited in claim 16, the interface permits a manufacturer to query product specification data from the database for use outside of the database.

        22.   The system recited in claim 21, wherein product specification data for a product can be exported from the database to a manufacturer in one of an Excel spreadsheet format
10   (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a CSV format.

        23.   The system recited in claim 16, wherein the interface is capable of providing a link to a Web page generated on behalf of a manufacturer and comprising product specification data for one or more products of that manufacturer.

15   24.   The system recited in claim 23, wherein the Web page is co-branded by both the manufacturer and the entity that operates the system.

        25.   The system recited in claim 16, wherein the remuneration required for access to
20   the database comprises a fee paid by each manufacturer.

        26.   The system recited in claim 25, wherein the fee comprises a monetary payment.

        27.   The system recited in claim 25, wherein the fee comprises a one-time fee.

25   28.   The system recited in claim 25, wherein the fee comprises a periodically recurring fee.

        29.   The system recited in claim 25, wherein the fee is based on usage of the database
30   by a manufacturer.

30.   The system recited in claim 29, wherein the fee for a given manufacturer is based on the volume of product information stored in the database by that manufacturer.

5   31.   The system recited in claim 29, wherein the fee for a given manufacturer is based on a number of times that the manufacturer accesses the database to retrieve product specification data.

32.   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored

10   thereon comprising component that form a system for enabling an entity to serve as an application service provider with respect to product specification data of a plurality of manufacturers, the components comprising;

a database of specifications of products of the plurality of different manufacturers, the product specifications in the database being arranged in predefined product classes; and

15   an interface for use by the plurality of manufacturers for the entry of specifications of products in a given product class, there being defined, for each product class, a schema for the entry of specifications of products in that product class, the interface requiring each manufacturer to use the defined schema for a given product class when entering product specification data for products in that class,

20   the interface further providing each manufacturer that provides remuneration for use of the interface with access to its respective product specification data in the database for use outside of the database.

33.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the interface

25   component further comprises a component that a manufacturer can use to search for and list product specification data stored in the database for its products.

34.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the interface component further comprises a component that a manufacturer can use to add and edit the

30   product specification data for a single product in the database.

35.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the interface component further comprises a component that enables a manufacturer to add or edit the product specification data for multiple products in a single data feed.

36.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 35, wherein the interface component is capable of accepting product specification data for a product in one of an Excel spreadsheet format (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a Comma Separated Value (CSV) format.

37.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the interface component permits a manufacturer to query product specification data from the database for use outside of the database.

38.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 37, wherein product specification data for a product can be exported from the database to a manufacturer in one of an Excel spreadsheet format (XLS), an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, and a CSV format.

39.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the interface component is capable of providing the manufacturer with a link to a Web page generated on behalf of a manufacturer that contains product specification data from the database.

40.   The computer-readable medium recited in claim 39, wherein the Web page is co-branded by both the manufacturer and the entity that operates the system.

41.   The method recited in claim 1, wherein the remuneration is in the form of permission from the manufacturer to use the product specification data in connection with an other method.

42. The method recited in claim 41, wherein said use of the product specification data in connection with an other method comprises using the product specification data in connection with product offers hosted by an online shopping Web site.

5   43. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the interface operates to pull product specification data from a manufacturer and to format it in accordance with a respective product class schema.

44. The system recited in claim 16, wherein the remuneration is in the form of

10   permission from the manufacturer to use the product specification data in connection with an other method.

45. The system recited in claim 44, wherein said use of the product specification data in connection with an other method comprises using the product specification data in connection

15   with product offers hosted by an online shopping Web site.

46. The system recited in claim 16, wherein the interface operates to pull product specification data from a manufacturer and format it in accordance with a respective product class schema.

20   47. The computer-readable medium recited in claim 32, wherein the remuneration is in the form of permission from the manufacturer to use the product specification data in connection with an other method.

25   48. The computer-readable medium recited in claim 47, wherein said use of the product specification data in connection with an other method comprises using the product specification data in connection with product offers hosted by an online shopping Web site.

49.   The system recited in claim 32, wherein the interface operates to pull product specification data from a manufacturer and format it in accordance with a respective product class schema.

5